

## The Sound of Silents: Silent Film and Benshis' Oral Performance

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The lecture I gave in September of 2018 focused on benshi, the lecturers/explainers/narrators at silent film theaters in Japan. I discussed the following four points:

- Functions and Roles of *Benshi*
- History of *Benshi*
- *Benshi* in Today's World
- "*Benshi*: Silent Film Narrators in Japan" Digital Archive

A close study of *benshi* oral performance alongside film screenings and its surrounding popular cultural productions show us how a transitory, vernacular mode of cultural entertainment generated an intricate web of other popular cultural forms such as phonograph records, radio shows, printed benshi narrations, and even literary works. Collectively, this multi-media assemblage helped to cultivate new habits of listening and other forms of enjoyment in response to the transforming sensory environment of modernity during the early twentieth century. In the last portion of my lecture, I showed parts of my digital archive that uses digital tools such as VR and GPS to gain further insight into the ways that *benshi* performers engaged in a dynamic, multisensory, and inter-media performance as a part of introducing film to Japanese audiences.